Simpson Demands Fulbright Explain Remark on Tonkin

By Bryce Nelson
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Sen. Milward L. Simpson (R-Wyo.) demanded yesterday that Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) explain his characterization of the 1964 Tonkin Gulf naval battle as "very questionable."

Fulbright made his statement about the character of the North Vietnamese attack on U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf in August, 1964, in his questioning of Secretary of State Dean Rusk in a committee hearing on May 9.

In a Senate speech, Simpson said that he was "inclined to accept the White House version of Tonkin Gulf" although "I will certainly acknowledge that utter candor is not a hallmark of this Administration."

The Wyoming Republican said that if Fulbright has or can obtain evidence to substantiate his doubts about the Administration version of the Tonkin Gulf incident that "it would be in the national interest to fully pursue this matter with hearings, investigations, or public disclosures . . ."

In talking to reporters yesterday, Fulbright tended to soft-pedal his original May 9 statement, saying that "I obviously have no way to question the validity" of the Administration interpretation of the Tonkin incident.

Fulbright said yesterday that he had received a memorandum earlier this year from a retired U.S. Navy Admiral that threw doubt on the Administration version of the Tonkin incident. He did not identify the Admiral.

It was learned yesterday that Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee was briefed on the incident by Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton in closed session on May 24.

Simpson, who terms himself a "hawk on Vietnam," said that "it is a most serious business when doubt is cast upon the basic facts of an international incident which triggered a Senate resolution giving the President of the United States virtual carte blanche authority in dealing with a war situation."

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